

PAPINO



Volume 1



Take a look at that picture up there. Just look at it, and bask in its half-assed pretension and obscurity... Don't get your intellectual hopes up, it's really just me drunkenly snapping a picture of an even drunker stranger, in a country that wasn't even my own. And that's what you will get with this little photo art prose collection called PAPINO; horseshit, apathy, depictions of the wonder and banality of life, skating, partying, self-denial, art, and the kooks we encounter walking down the street. Oh, and other random things that might make you smirk. – Tad Malone, *Editor*

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Outcast

Sophia Boettcher



The man with the moustache growing from his nose
He eats like a caterpillar
Slowly, compulsively
His lips draw morsels to them as if by gravity
He smiles forlornly like a toad
His forehead impearling with sweat
The crack of his mouth wends its way to black owl eyes
At lunch he always sits alone.

BAe 143
Tad Malone

Dave would swirl his glass of ice
shards and vintage Talisker
boast to ears half-turned
'You know I flew the queen once'
and...what?
gleam that faded back to dust
but how their eyes would listen
if he told them how they burned
their clothes in oil drums
but organized their underwear
in masses in the sun.

Brown Recluse

Rick Enolam



Some local idiot told me the story of one of his mushroom trips, and it's one of the more harrowing that I've heard. It's not that I necessarily believed him, but it's entertaining enough to fill a page. Apparently, he had procured about an eighth of magic fungus and planned out his usual trip, sitting glass eyed in his room watching the iTunes visualizer, looking at the stars, or whatever he dumb shit he did. He said he was seeing miraculous lights, filling his room or something equally psychedelic. He was blabbering on about the usual mysticism that comes with mushrooms and Goa Trance, so I interrupted him to ask why he was so eager to tell me about this trip. He caught himself, and began to stutter through what happened next.

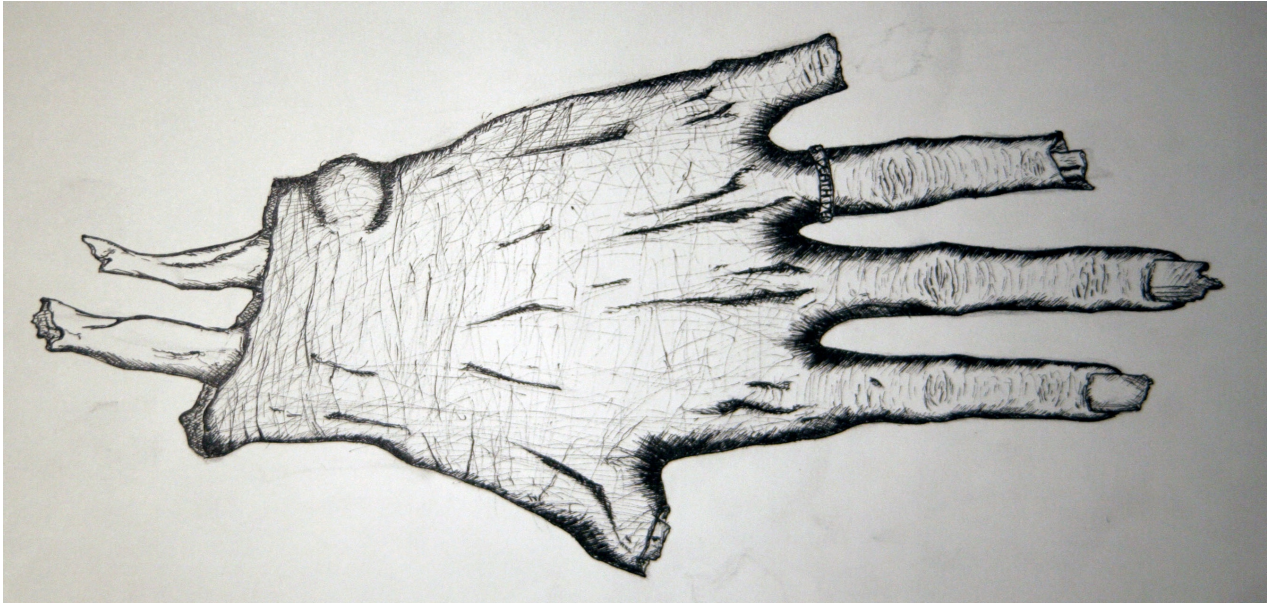
In the midst of his happy stupor, a small spider caught his eye on the floor, and he bent down to inspect it. Naturally it felt his presence and scurried into a corner behind a bureau. He gave a silly chase and managed to corner it with two dirty shirts. He picked the spider up, marveling at his capture and their living connection and the wonders of nature and how alike he was with the spider and all the other shit you feel when your shroom, when he felt a shocking pain. He threw off the spider and as the pain multiplied unbelievably he staggered out of his room in a poisonous haze. The next think he knows he's in the emergency room, still tripping and even more confused. Turns out, that spider was a brown recluse and even though the bite wasn't deadly, he passed out, nearly hitting his head on his beds frame. His mom ran in hearing the sound and freaked. Since he was in the emergency room for a spider bite, they hadn't the slightest idea he was peaking on a poisonous trip and didn't test for any drug. He served his day in the hospital watching the walls wiggle, maybe reflecting on his brush with death and probably costing his parents a grand, then walking out none the wiser.



Three Drawings

By Morohoshi

(note) When I first enquired about my friend Mo's drawings, I got the feeling that he either wasn't interested in showing off or wasn't capable. But after constant prodding and nagging (and a little herbal incentive), I was proven wrong. I'm not going to speak for the artwork, just check it out. And hopefully, if Mos modesty doesn't get in the way, you'll see more of his work in upcoming issues.







Backside Bigspin

Tad Malone



Darren had spotted the stairs one day when he took a different route to work. Sipping on an energy drink while driving, he happened to look up and almost skidded to a stop, seeing a stair set of ten, with a perfect run up and end and a near perfect location. He stared at it, judging its dimensions until the line of cars behind him honked and he quickly sped away. He took that same route for the whole week, each morning slowing his car to a crawl by the stair set, absorbing all of its possibilities and hazards. He had yet to see any security or people hanging around, and he knew if he came alone and parked across the street, he could make a clean break if any problems should arise. From all of his observations, Darren had decided it was an immaculate spot, one perfect for skating long periods without interruption. The only thing that bothered him was a skittering crack in the pavement two feet from the last step, and after inspecting it every day for a week, this small, nearly invisible hiccup grew into the most frightening aspect of the spot. On Friday after work, he drove to the stairs and climbed them with his board under his arm. From this angle, at the top, every aspect changed. The perfect stairs he had seen from his car and morphed into a big, cement monument to the unattainable. He looked around as if someone might be noticing his internal battle, but he was alone. He began to pace in a small circle, tapping the tail of his board on the ground. He thought of the tricks that were possible, a frontside 180 or a kickflip, but when he tried to visualize himself in the air over the stairs he could only get to the landing, where his board would most likely catch the crack and he would be tossed into the ground.

I'm here, Darren thought, what am I waiting for? He skated back twenty feet, and stopped, staring again at the stairs. Now he could only see the top. He stared some more, and rubbed his hands nervously. Then almost without a decision he took off, pushing with force as he approached the stairs. He ollied at the edge and floated down the stairs, landing past the crack, wobbly but successful. The

strong fleeting feeling of fear and excitement were gone the instant he landed and had rolled away. He looked back at the stairs and they seemed smaller, approachable like they were when he had first spotted them a week before. He remembered he has a camera in the car, and quickly crossed the street to get it.

With a swelling confidence he affixed the camera to a stand about twenty feet from the bottom step, angling it slightly up to catch both the stairs and the ground in front.

With that first jump he felt vindicated, or at least capable of throwing down something special. He ran back up the stairs to his first spot, but gave himself a few extra feet of run up. He went for it again, pushing furiously until he was ten feet from the stairs. His feet repositioned, he crouched and popped the board into a clean spin that he caught halfway through the jump.

As soon as he was aware of his feet touching the board, he was on the ground. The board bounced away as pain shot through his ankle. He looked up confused. He knew it was the little crack that ruined his attempt, but still he felt an increasing sense of purpose, a drive to hammer this ten stair. He ran back up again, this time slightly limping. He decided against the front side Big Spin; that crack was not compatible with it. He knew he had to go faster and throw himself farther.

Although his adrenaline was surging, he took his time walking back to the commencement point. He wasn't entirely comfortable with a backside Big Spin, it required a strange flinging motion and perfect foot placement, but he thought of the split second hang time as his body turned with the spinning board and figured he could overshoot the crack.

This time, he truly took in the stair set and its looming edge. He was afraid but he had faith. Not in his ability, but in skateboarding and its mechanisms. He had landed enough scary tricks to know that it wasn't so much technique as it was sheer confidence in the action. He couldn't shake the butterflies in his stomach, but he knew if he didn't try it now, those butterflies would fill his chest and eventually his whole body. He looked up at a cloud, hesitating, and then took off. He pushed as fast as his legs would allow, getting his feet positioned just as he got to the stairs.

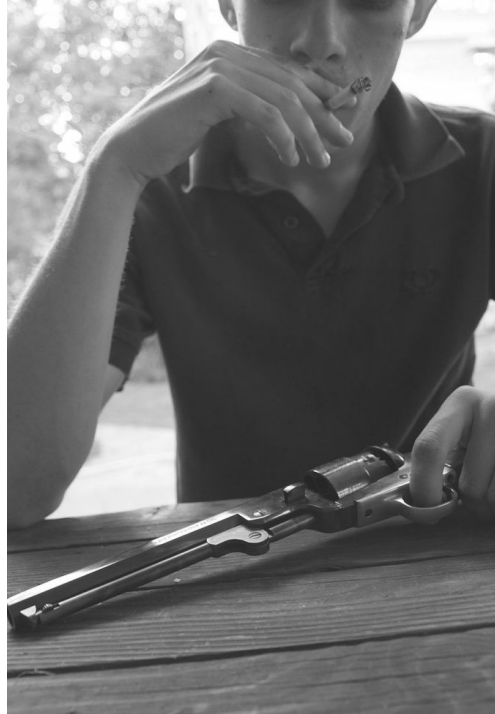
Instantly he popped the board into a sharp spin and turned with it as body and board sailed in tandem down the stairs.

For a brief moment he saw the stairs below him. Then as his feet caught the board and he landed on all wheels at once. The feeling of euphoria filled him as he rolled away and he wiped his forehead with his shirt. The trick was so impossibly huge that he put his head in his hands and kept rolling, reliving the snap of his board and the perfection of his landing as he rolled into the street and was hit by a car.



GAMBLE

Matt Chow



I wonder if this is going to hurt, Jack wondered as he stared down at the six-barrel revolver planted squarely in front of him sitting atop a simple circular, four-legged, wooden table. There is a red velvet cloth draped over the table, making it feel like a brand-new billiards table. But this is not the main purpose of the table. This table, placed in the backroom of a hole-in-the-wall dumping restaurant, was used primarily for the purposes of illegal gambling. Smoke pervaded the room and the only light came from a single light bulb, draped from the ceiling by its electrical cable, above the medium sized table. The table was bare besides the Colt Single Action Army that sat in front of Jack. This specific Single Action Army toted a customized ivory handle and clean polished body that made the gun look as if it was crafted from silver. The game is, of course, Russian Roulette, a game that Jack had always joked about, but, up until this very moment, had never played.

For those of you who haven't played Russian Roulette or do not know the rules to such a game, it is quite simple. What you will need for the game is a circular table, a revolver, a bullet, and a good amount of cleaning supplies. The number of players is dictated by the number of barrels in the revolver you have chosen. In this case, the Colt Single Action Army that was used in Jack's game has six chambers. Thus, there can only be up to six players at a time. The single bullet is placed in a random chamber and the barrel is spun in order to randomize the placement of the bullet. Each player sits at the circular table and watches as the other players puts the revolver to their heads and pulls the trigger. The game continues until one of the players blows his brains out. Of course this is a gambler's game and as such there is usually a reward. This is where the game begins to differ depending on where you are. Some of the more hardcore gamblers play multiple rounds, others split the money between the five of them and then players can buy into the next game if they are brave enough. For Jack, in the easy-going suburb of Sunnyvale, California, all he needed to do was survive this round. If he could survive this one round, then he

could finally get home and put these last three days behind him. He would be done with Mickey and all the organized crime that had gotten him into this situation. However, there was one problem: he was number five out of six and the first four men were still alive. Two chambers left, a fifty-fifty chance he was going to die that night and the events of these past three of days were just a precursor to his death.

Jack stared down at the gun sitting before him and as the thought of his possible death ran across his mind, he thought back on these last few days and possibly what went wrong. He thought back to the apartment that he shared with Denise, his girlfriend. He was sitting on the couch after a long day of work when this weekend started.

"Jack...we need to talk."

"Hey honey, what's up?"

"Well...how do I say this?"

"What is it?"

"I...think we should..."

"Go on a vacation?"

"...I was going to say break up."

"What?" Jack was alarmed, apparently this came as a surprise.

"It's not you...I mean, I'm going through a lot of..." Denise was fumbling around with her words as if trying to decide whether to lie or to tell the truth.

"Denise, what is going on? Did something happen?"

"I just..." Denise stopped at this, she couldn't make up her mind, but she had committed to ending their relationship in this moment on this day, she could not simply stop. "I slept with Don."

Jack looked away in a moment of confusion and pain, "Don? Who is Don?"

"Don, you know, the...barista from...Starbucks."

"The...coffee guy!?"

"Yeah, well...I mean, he is also a play-writing student at UCLA and his family..."

"I don't need to know more about the guy you cheated on me with!"

"Enough!" one of the players said impatiently bringing Jack back into the present, "We've waited long enough, get on with it." He motioned towards the gun and Jack. Most of the other men were silent, but at this the player sitting next to Jack took the cigarette from his mouth and spoke to the impatient player in the most calm voice Jack had ever heard.

"Dr. Harrison, as you can see this boy isn't even past his prime. Understanding the fact that he may never see the sun rise again, perhaps you should give him some time before he plays his turn."

"We've waited long enough, he has almost been sitting there for what seems like half an hour! I would like to get home at some point in time."

"Harrison," the smoking player said, "it has only been five minutes and this boy has an important decision to make." The smoker was wrong, Jack did not have a choice, this was the only way he could get enough money to pay off Mickey and only after Mickey had his money could Jack walk away and treat all this like a bad dream. But, even with all this in his mind, Jack did not want to back down. Jack wanted to prove something, perhaps to Denise, maybe even to himself. Jack no longer wanted the life he had before this weekend, but he was also unsure that he was willing to die for such a metamorphosis. This indecision quickly pulled him away from reality, to the point that he no longer heard Harrison and the smoker speaking.

"I...felt trapped," Denise said as Jack and she stood outside Walt's apartment complex next to Denise's car. Jack had quickly fled the scene after Denise's confession and found shelter at his

best friend's house. Walt, short for Walter Bubbs, had been Jack's friend since freshman year of college and was the one person he went to in these times of desperation.

"What do you mean?" Jack asked.

"I mean I am twenty-five, the prime of my youth and my boyfriend's idea of a good Friday night is sitting at home and watching a Law and Order rerun."

"Law and Order is quality television," Jack spoke defensively.

"You don't even watch SVU, the only good Law and Order. And, if an episode comes on that you have seen, you watch it again! It doesn't have second-round secrets Jack! You aren't going to uncover something new the second time around!"

"I..."

"Every week night you do the same thing, you come home, watch the news, eat dinner, which is usually a Subway sandwich, then surf the web and go to sleep. You do this every night! Like clockwork. I am too young to be acting like I am sixty!"

"So that's why you slept with Don, the Starbucks barista slash play-writing grad student?"

"As crazy as it sounds! Yes! Yes, that is exactly why. Jack, I understand if you want the boring quiet life that you have worked so hard to maintain, but I'm too young for all that. I'm not ready to settle down yet. I want more than that."



Jack finally understood Denise's words on that Friday afternoon. Before this weekend, his life was boring. He listened to the same CD every day on the way to work, he watched a lot of Law and Order: Criminal Intent, and he liked the news. His days surrounded that same routine since college. Jack chuckled, to the surprise of his tablemates, about what Denise would say if she saw him now. He touched the gun, which seemed to set everyone in the room on edge. He took his hand off of it and the room seemed to reset back to normal.



“Don’t worry about that stupid bitch,” Walt said as he put his arm around Jack in the passenger seat of Walt’s Jeep Grand Cherokee, “Right now, as we speak, I am taking you to one of the greatest places on earth.”

“Where would that be?” Jack asked in disbelief.

"A happy place by the name of Sunnyvale in the great state of California. There really isn't anything to do there, but my drug dealer, Derek, is having a birthday party and he says it's going to be great."

"Why didn't you just leave me at your place?"

"Because I thought that, instead of sulking all weekend and watching Law and Order, my friend, whose girlfriend of eleven months recently cheated on him with a Starbucks barista, could go balls out with me at my drug dealer's house party."

"Why not," Jack said, "maybe this is what my boring life needs."

Jack laughed for a second time at the circular table with the smoker and Harrison. *This is exactly what I need*, he thought sarcastically while looking over at Derek with that bloody makeshift bandage on his hand.

"Are you alright son?" the smoker asked as he sent a look of concern towards Jack.

"I'm alright," Jack chuckled again, "I'm just trying to remember how all this got started."

The smoker chuckled, "I ask myself that question most nights."

Jack smiled at the friendly face of the smoker, but, this was not an existential question that Jack was asking himself. He was simply recalling the events of the night from the time he and Walt arrived at Derek's house party to the moment that same party was crashed by a the local source of everything pill-related: Mickey McCourt. Apparently, Derek the weed dealer had recently dipped his hands into the ecstasy trade and conveniently forgot to pay respect to the appropriate underworld authorities. Thus, Mickey McCourt had decided to show Derek who owned the ecstasy market in Santa Clara County by crashing his 27th birthday party. Almost ten minutes after Jack and Walt settled in the hot tub in the backyard, they heard a crash in the house and gunfire. Jack and Walt see strippers, miscellaneous drug enthusiasts, and a pimp run away from the house,

but Jack and Walt did not run. Rather, they *could* not run, because Walt's car keys were on his pants and his pants were on the kitchen table a few feet from the backyard in which they sat.

"I'm...I'm sorry Mr. McCourt," Derek cried while clutching his bloody hand.

"Did you think I wasn't going to find out about this Mr. Tran?" Mickey said while swinging a pistol around, "I know about every little ecstasy deal that goes down in our fair county!"

"I...I know Mr. McCourt, please, I didn't mean any disrespect. Really! Please!"

Walt and Jack, attempting to leave the area snuck quietly into the kitchen. They were almost free of the whole situation until Walt, in his desperation to escape quickly dropped his pants and allowed the keys to splash onto the kitchen tile, which made just enough noise to alert Mickey McCourt and his associates of their presence.

"Well who the fuck is this?" Mickey asked as two of his gunmen dragged Walt and Jack into the living room and threw them down next to the bloodied Derek.

"We're just two of Derek's buyers," Walt pleaded, "We just came for the party."

"And what, may I ask, do you two buy from our mutual friend here?" Mickey asked menacingly as he usually speaks during these types of situations.

"Weed...sir," Walt blurts out.

"No ecstasy?"

"No, just the weed."

"You two wouldn't be lying to me would ya? Just saying what the man with the gun wants to hear?"

"No of course not, never touched the stuff after college, just weed for us."

"Well," Mickey says, "I'm inclined to believe you two and I grieve for your unfortunate circumstances, but you two will be staying right here until my business with your friend is concluded." Mickey turns away from Walt and Jack and shoves his gun into Derek's neck. "Now where is your money boy?"

“It’s...it’s not here.”

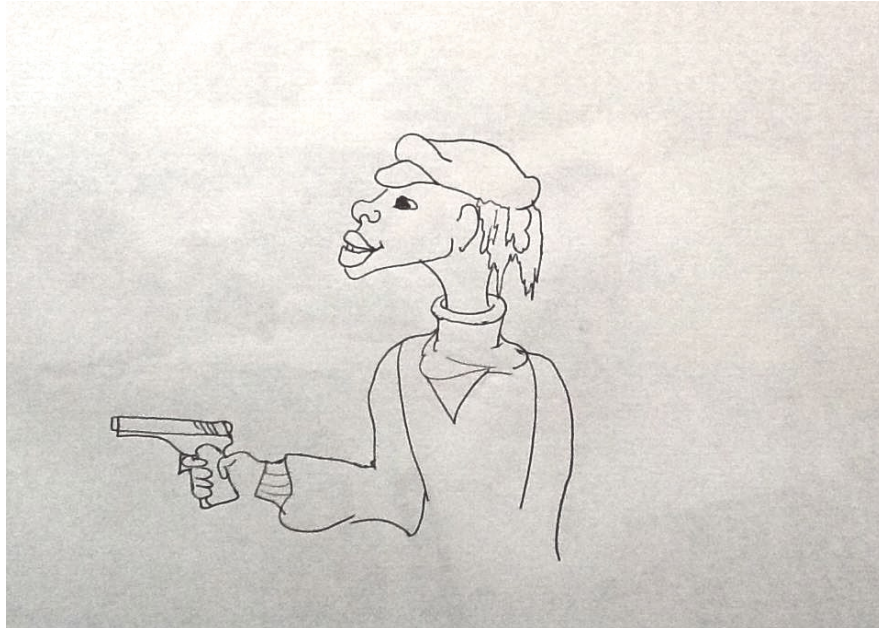
“I know where it’s *not*, I want to know where it *is*.”

“Well, you see...” Derek chuckled nervously. Most of Derek’s money, besides the two thousand he keeps for emergencies, was inaccessible for the time being. You see, Derek, before becoming one of the main marijuana dealers in Santa Clara County, had gone to college at NYU and receive a double major in finance and economics. Thus, in a strategic gamble to improve his finances, Derek invested most of his profits in stocks. This was disappointing news to Mickey, who, in an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, planned to discipline Derek for his impudence by shooting him in the hand and stealing all his money. He would then use this money to pay off his suppliers. Sadly, due to Derek’s lack of funds, Mickey was forced to resort to a game of Russian Roulette, the only game in all of the Cupertino criminal underground that would win Mickey the funds necessary to repay his father. This is where Jack finally came into the picture. Mickey, while standing over Derek’s quivering form realized that it was not he who had to play the game, but simply a member of Mickey McCourt’s family. Derek was out of the question because the players would know his face and he wasn’t remotely Irish enough, Walt also did not have the proper complexion to feign an Irish background. And thus Mickey laid his eyes on boring Jack, half Irish on his mother’s side. These were the unfortunate events leading up to Jack’s participation in this game. In order to save not only his life, but the lives of Derek and Walt, he would have to play the game, and if he survived, the winnings would buy their freedom.

“So what’ll it be kid?” Harrison asks staring into Jack’s face with impatience. It is easy for him to be impatient since he survived his shot and is simply waiting for the end.

“Have you ever been called boring?” Jack asked as he took hold of the Colt Single Action Army. The men at the table quieted down and all eyes in the room were on Jack. He raised it to his head and pointed the barrel against his head. He wrapped his finger around the trigger and squeezed with absolute steadiness.

Click.



Between Two Lungs

Meggan Sisto

Look at me.

At me, standing here.

Look and shake your head all you want. At my glossy eyes, these restless hands, my halted breaths, these ragged words slicing into one another. Laugh and sigh all you want, because I have something better than your cynically sheltered way of being. I've got my naked heart, a speaker that's always on eleven. Forget that exposure makes contraction of infection inevitable and that your arteries will pulsate a millisecond slower after recovery. Forget that broadcasting is bundled in a single muscle fiber with apprehension and that they will compete bloodily, repeatedly, to dominate the four chambers of your heart. Forget that transparency means entrusting the sinoatrial node, your pacemaker, to another, and that the outcome, the timing of each heartbeat, is regulated without your input. Forget that the vena cava veins will feed toxically numbing blood to your system, hardening your insides, throbbing for a more cautious approach. Forget that for a while you will let the toxin consume you, that the pericardium will develop a third or even fourth membrane to protect your heart, that you will adopt his cynically sheltered manner. Forget all that and understand that exposure makes blood course through your veins, and until you've felt these electric pulses wrapping rapidly around your core, dangling you over the ledge, sweetly teasing you with reward, nipping at your every sense—until you have felt such magnetic vivication, you know nothing of liberation.



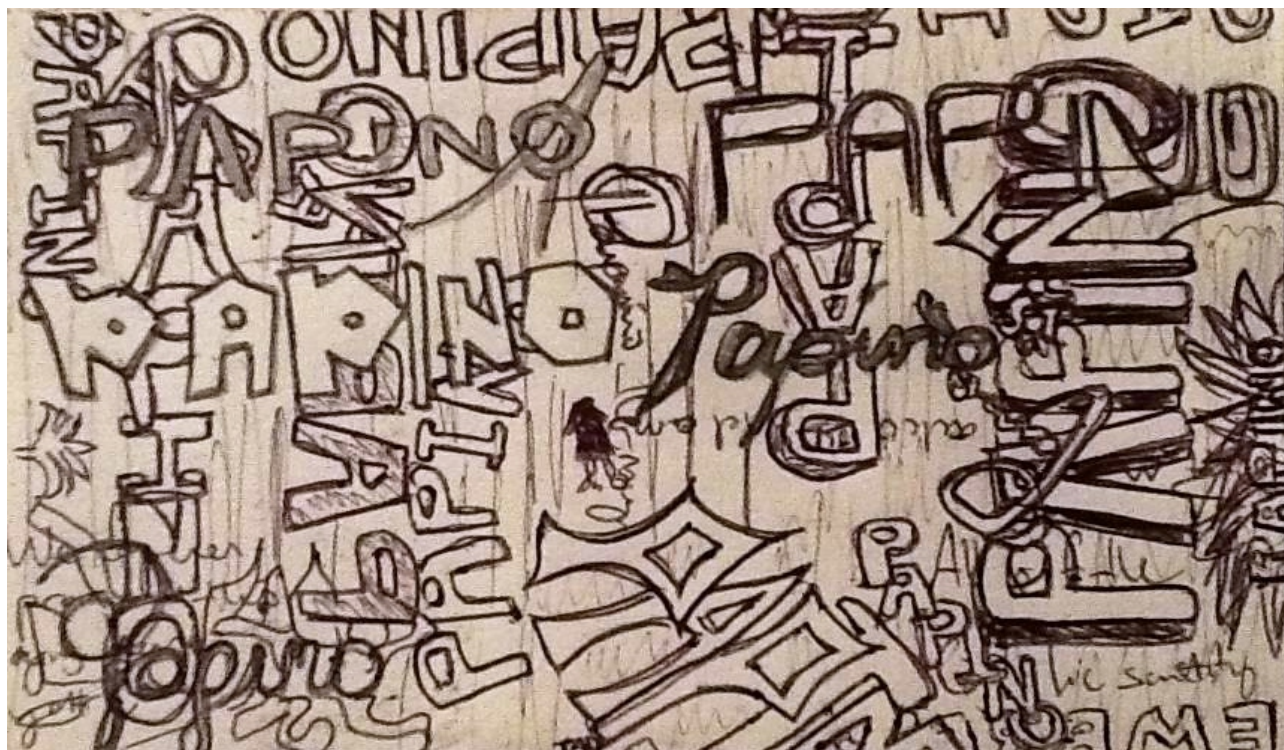
Blood then Wings

Stephen Layton

From you and me and the sea some things:
soap cigarettes saltwater gasoline
between the open windows stream.

From you and me and the trees some things:
bark-cut skin, blood then wings
stir the dusty sunlight streams.

From you and me and the bees some things:
those honey small stings
inside what's lost, inside what lingers.





Tumbleweeds

by Michael Rosa

Out on the tarmac, the engine teetered on the cusp of sputtering out in defiance to his right foot. Exhausted by the lack of fuel and genuinely disgruntled in the heat of Arizona's summer, James pulled over to step out and read a sign which was otherwise illegible; covered in dust and reflecting the sun's rays in a blinding white light reminiscent of the fluorescent bulbs that stuttered in his high-school biology class.

12 MI. UNTIL NEXT REST STOP..

Twelve miles was the distance between him and any resemblance of civilization. It appeared as though the entirety of vegetation in the region had taken a vacation. Only the tan tumble weeds showed as much enthusiasm as he to simply move, to be somewhere else, away from no name Arizona, where even the devil brought a bottle of water for fear of dehydration.

There was no point in standing out in the heat. The door creaked as soon as he pulled the handle, protesting what it knew would be a grueling twelve miles. When he sat back down in the driver's seat, it moaned, sinking under his weight, as if he were the last straw on this thirsty camel's back. James turned the key. Engine attempting to turn, he tried pushing the gas to jump-start the old sedan, but it was no use. He took the keys out of the ignition, then his imitation Ray

Bans off of his face. James rubbed the bridge of his nose, simultaneously blinking sweat out of his eyes.

Of all the sons-of-bitches in this Godforsaken stretch of worthless land, he was stranded. He realized, of course, that he was the *only* son-of-a-bitch in this Godforsaken stretch of worthless land. The corners of his lips turned up for the first time since Colorado. Putting his sunglasses back on, he put the keys back in the ignition and turned. The engine coughed then quietly roared to life.

He looked solemnly at the dash board, surprisingly disappointed that the car started. At this point, he just wanted the trip to be over. But the soft vibrations coming up through the floorboards ensured at least another twelve miles.

"California better be worth it."

Next

By Henry T. Johnson

The airport terminal is busy when I step off the plane, I swing my bag over my shoulder and walk towards baggage claim. There are people all around, waiting for their friends and loved ones, but the sound of their meetings is drowned out by my iPod playing Lady Gaga as I walk past all the eagerly staring parents or friends, some jumping to embrace their tearing children as they come off the plane. *First-years*, I think to myself as I walk out of baggage claim and towards the street. It is spring break and everyone is flying home from college, over half the people on my plane were loud, chatty college students excited about their return home from the throes of finals week intertwined with drama concerning their roommate or their significant others. If this was last year, then I would be together in the same category: the chatty college student fresh off of energy drinks and all-night studying ready for some R&R after the second quarter of the school year. But, this is not last year, and as of two days ago, I am no longer a college student. Graduated a quarter early with honors from the great and glorified University of California, San Diego. Entered with high hopes, left with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature. Was that a smart move? Only time will tell.

I walk out and feel the brisk cold hit me like a wall. I left San Diego wearing shorts and a t-shirt in sunny seventy degree weather only to come home and meet with the sky attempting to drown the earth. I sit down on a bench in the pick-up area. My parents are late, but I appreciate the time alone. I breathe in the air and it feels different, crisp, alive. I can't help but smile as my body realizes that I have come home.

A cold breeze hits me and I feel it in my bones. My hand quickly takes hold of my bag and opens it looking for the jacket I place inside for just this occasion. However, to its surprise it find

unfamiliar objects inhabiting my bag. I am about to look in, when I feel a tap on my shoulder. A woman is standing behind me holding a bag identical to mine.

"I think we switched bag," the woman says, "I assume *you* are Nick O'Shaughnessy."

I look at the bag I am holding, "Are you Arianna Santos." I feel like an idiot and my voice conveys that feeling. We exchange bags and Arianna looks inside. I pull out my sweater and finally find some reprieve from the cold. She finds that I have not stolen anything from her and, with this moves over to the stop sign to wait for whoever has been given the duty of picking her up. I try to return to my music, but this woman has caught my eye and I can't help but look over at her every once in a while. Eventually, I realize that she has made the same mistake that I have; wearing summer clothes in winter weather. She shivers to keep the cold off, but to no avail. A cold wind sweeps through and she moves from her place at the stop sign to the bench where I am sitting. We try to ignore each other at first, but after she shivers again I pull a second jacket out of my bag and present it to her. "You look cold," I try to say nicely, but it sounds more gruff than anything.

She looks at me for a second and then takes the jacket, "Two jackets?"

"You can never be too sure," I say looking over at her, "you never know when there will be someone who needs it."

"It looks like we have both been stranded, Nick O'Shaughnessy" Arianna says to me. I check the time and it has been thirty minutes after my flight landed.

"Looks like it," I say stretching my legs, "So what are you doing in San Jose?"

Arianna Santos is a first-year graduate student at the University of San Diego, that shiny Catholic school up on the hill above my school. Their school motto is *Emitte Spiritum Tuum*, in English that means: "Send Forth Thy Spirit". I don't remember how I know this, but I do, probably saw it on a campus visit or something. Arianna herself was studying anthropology, basically where we humans come from and how we are what we are today. She is here in San Diego

because it is her brother's wedding. He is wed to a "blond uppity-bitch", but I do not dig further, the politics of my own family are complicated enough without me having to hear about another's. She looks at me intrigued.

"So what about you Nick? Why are you here?"

I pause for a moment to consider the existential question she has posed me. But, ignore my tangential mind and tell her that I have just graduated from college and am seeking free room and board at my parents' house while I...I can't finish my sentence, not really. I have been thinking a lot about what I'm going to do, but seriously enough I just don't know. Arianna sees me pause and chuckles a little. I look up confused.

"You know, a year ago, I was in the same place you were." She recounts her brief, ten month stint as a waitress at an Olive Garden. She was living at home, just barely making enough to make her loan payments and keep a social life, however limited.

"You know the one thing I learned in those ten months?" Arianna asked me. I shook my head. "Just don't think about it." I look confused. "I kept on thinking about what I *could* do and what I *should* do, but I never considered what I *wanted* to do. Finally, when I stopped thinking so much, I realized that I knew what I wanted to do all along."

"Study anthropology?"

"Exactly."

We talked a little bit more, but soon her ride comes to pick her up. She pats me on the back, shakes my hand, and whispers in my ear, "just wing it." before she rides off, out of my life for the foreseeable future. I want her to stay, but soon I find my ride home.

My father and mother are sitting in the Civic with the heater on and oldies lite-rock playing on the radio. They are happy to see me and besides the years of resentment I have towards my father I can't help but crack a smile when I see the two of them. I quickly jump into the back seat with my bag and we drive off. They tell me that everything that I sent home got there safely and I

am relieved. My TV is safe, I feel a weight lift itself from my mind. The drive home is loud as my boisterous father berates me with questions about my final quarter. "Do you think you passed all your classes?" "Are you sure you won't have to go back for the next quarter?" "What classes *did* you take?" "Chinese History? Which dynasty?" I finally answer all his questions in time to enjoy the last five minutes of the car ride. The rain is falling and the clouds blanket the sky, but it isn't night just yet and the sunlight from behind the clouds lights everything in a grey hue, one of my favorite times of the year. I stare out at familiar landscape, but it all seems different to me, I am no longer working towards living in the real world, no longer taking classes on skills that I will need when I become a real human being. No more time in the training simulator, this is the real world and this realization begins to hit me harder than the weather did twenty minutes ago.

We get home and I drag my bags into the room I slept in as a child. I flick the light switch and the room is illuminated casting light upon all of my books and pictures. I don't unpack anything, I just throw my bags into a corner and lay down on my bed, the flight was short, but I feel tired. My conversation with Arianna Santos continues to play in my mind. I must have been staring at the wall for a long time because my mother walks in and asks me if I'm okay. I tell her I'm fine, but her look of concern does not leave her face. She tells me that these next couple of months may be rough and that I can take all the time I need to think about what to do next. I thank her as she walks out of my room. I think for a while about what I need to do and sigh as I come to the same mental road block I have encountered before whenever I think about these things.

"Just wing it huh?" I say under my breathe, "maybe..."

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